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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003077

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: PRIMERO JUSTICIA JUMPS FROM THE SINKING OPPOSITION

REF: A. CARACAS 3013

[1B.](#) CARACAS 3070

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

[11.](#) (C) Venezuelan opposition party Primero Justicia withdrew from the Coordinadora Democratica September 24. Lines of cooperation among groups opposed to President Hugo Chavez have been reduced to documenting fraud claims related to the referendum, negotiating with the National Electoral Council (CNE) for the October 31 elections for governors and mayors, and selecting unified candidates to face pro-Chavez candidates in those elections. End summary.

Primero Justicia Separates from the Coordinadora

[12.](#) (U) Leaders of the opposition political party Primero Justicia (PJ) announced September 24 the party had withdrawn from the Coordinadora Democratica. PJ leader Julio Borges told reporters the Coordinadora had done a respectable job in reaching the recall referendum against President Hugo Chavez. He said it is now time for PJ to leave the opposition alliance and build a political party that offers a viable alternative to Venezuelans. The 34-year-old Borges said PJ hopes to facilitate a "generational change" in political leadership in Venezuela.

[13.](#) (C) PJ Secretary General Jose Luis Mejias told poloff September 29 PJ's post-referendum strategy is to go into the poor neighborhoods and make inroads into Chavez's support base. In an effort to dispel PJ's image as a right-wing party of young rich urbanites, Mejias said PJ would open the party to other sectors of Venezuelan society. He specifically mentioned the possibility that Causa R, led by former presidential hopeful and labor activist Andres Velasquez, might join with PJ. (Velasquez and Alianza Bravo Pueblo's Antonio Ledezma separated from the Coordinadora just days before (ref a).) Mejias said PJ is not focused on the October 31 elections for governors and mayors as PJ has only a handful of likely winners. He said PJ is instead more focused on the 2005 National Assembly elections and on fielding a candidate to challenge President Chavez in 2006.

Death Rites For the Coordinadora

[14.](#) (C) Mejias described PJ's departure from the Coordinadora as a political necessity. He said the Coordinadora was "practically dead" and no longer served PJ's interests. He added that Accion Democratica and Proyecto Venezuela had also quit the Coordinadora though without fanfare. Mejias said only three areas of cooperation currently among opposition groups remain. First, the secretaries general of opposition parties continue to meet regularly to work out single opposition candidacies to face pro-Chavez candidates in the regional elections. Mejias was pessimistic on this point, however, saying there is no political will to consolidate candidacies. Second, opposition governors and mayors continue their common negotiation with the National Electoral Council (CNE) to secure acceptable conditions for the regional elections. Third, a diverse team of experts, including PJ representatives, will continue to work with Tullio Alvarez to pursue fraud charges related to the recall referendum (ref b). Mejias added that the Coordinadora's political committee, composed of parties and NGOs, has ceased to hold meetings.

[15.](#) (C) In a lunch with Coordinadora representatives Juan Fernandez (Gente de Petroleo), Daniel Thiman (an aide to Miranda State Governor Enrique Mendoza), and Amado Dounia (an electoral expert with the COPEI party), Fernandez expressed great disappointment in the Coordinadora. He said the

Coordinadora had become "nothing" and lamented that many groups had forsaken opposition unity to serve their own interests. Fernandez said he was not in agreement with Mendoza's decision to hand control of the Coordinadora over

to Pompeyo Marquez, whom he described as "an old man" who lacks vision. Thiman criticized the MAS party and its associated NGOs as "a bunch of leftists" who practically joined the government by giving in after the referendum.

16. (C) Fernandez, who has been attending assemblies throughout Venezuela of his organization's membership, said he saw little cooperation among opposition groups in the country's interior and predicted they would lose overwhelmingly in the regional elections. He asserted that Chavez is already trying to build a "Chavista-lite" opposition, financed indirectly by the GOV, to contend with Chavez's traditional opponents and play the part of a loyal opposition.

Comment

17. (C) The passing of the referendum eliminated the cohesive force that maintained unity with the Coordinadora. Parties with a wisp of political future are protecting their interests by participating in the elections while others (mostly opposition NGOs) are attributing to themselves the moral high ground and withdrawing, for now, from the scene. The result for the time being is the re-fragmentation of the opposition. Primero Justicia is the first major party to leave the Coordinadora. PJ has always fancied itself as a "party of the future" and so it is not surprising it would not linger around the political corpse of the Coordinadora. The party faces a challenge, however, to shed its yuppie image and cast itself as an organization with popular roots.

Brownfield

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